

To See or Not to See, Act II

Wave 31 May 1984

by Dr. Kitty Ferguson

Finding the child with a lazy eye is critical because it is important to treat it before age five. However, there are other eye problems that can be just as important in the long run. The most common ones are the same problems adults have; nearsighted, farsighted and astigmatism. Nearsighted means you see best up close (and poorly at a distance.) Farsighted is the opposite: you see well at a distance but have trouble near. Astigmatism is a defect in the front covering of the eye, rather like looking through wavy glass.

Normal children are a little farsighted in the preschool and early school years. This corrects with age and does not cause any difficulty. Significant farsighted-

ness may appear as difficulty reading, dislike of close work or a tendency to hold books at more distance than usual. Nearsightedness may show up as a preference for sitting in the front of the class, complaints of not being able to see the board or particular difficulty with the work presented on the board. Sometimes astigmatism will cause a tendency to hold the head at an angle or difficulty reading. If any of these problems are worse in one eye than the other lazy eye may result.

Important things other than school work may be affected by vision problems. It's hard to be a good batter if you can't see the ball. Poor vision may affect coordination and judging distances. It's not rare to find that the child who "just isn't good at

sports" has a vision problem. Vision problems may affect your appearance by causing straining or squinting. Even social problems may occur. Very nearsighted people are frequently felt to be unfriendly because they ignore acquaintances on the street. They don't recognize them! (If you've ever run into me

at the grocery store when I didn't have my contacts in you know how I know this. I'm much better at recognizing friends by the way they walk and their voices than by their faces!) If you complicate this problem by being a teenager who can't BEAR to wear glasses or who won't admit to having trouble seeing, you've got real problems.

Not all people with vision problems will complain. Many are

not even aware they have less than perfect vision. I had no hint of a problem until at age 18 I tried to get a driver's license and discovered I was a menace to the public because of my vision. When I got glasses it was a shock to discover that trees were not just soft fuzzy masses of green but had distinct shape to the leaves. Now when I look at the slightly out of focus paintings of a master like Renoir I think, "Ah, he must have been just as nearsighted as I am."

Dr. Ferguson is a Heber City pediatrician, a specialist in the care of children from birth to 18 years. If there is something you would like Dr. Ferguson to write about, address your question to Mountainland Medical Clinic, 30 South 500 East, Heber, Utah, 84032.

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